



Prophet Elias News

**News and Views for the Orthodox Church
of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
January 2023**



Becoming Like Holy Water: A Homily for Theophany by Fr Philip LeMasters

The focus of this great feast is the Lord's baptism in the river Jordan by St. John the Forerunner. The feast is known as Theophany, for it is revealed at Jesus Christ's baptism that He is the Son of God. Indeed, the Holy Trinity is revealed at His baptism, for the Father says, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," and the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove.

The meaning of the Feast of Christmas is fulfilled at Theophany, for now it is made clear that the One born in Bethlehem is truly God, come to restore our fallen nature and to renew the entire creation by uniting humanity with divinity in Himself. And even as the Son of God entered our world at His birth, He now enters the flowing water of a river in order to make it holy, in order to bring His blessing and fulfilment upon the world that He created. For the entire creation was subjected to futility because of the rebellion of our first parents. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now" for it also "will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

The good news of the gospel is that the Creator has become part of the creation in order to make it a new heaven and a new earth. We see at Theophany that nothing is intrinsically profane or cut off from the blessing and holiness of God. All things, physical and spiritual, visible and invisible, are called to participate in the divine glory that our Lord has brought to the world, to become part of the new heaven and earth of God's kingdom. Christ's baptism demonstrates that we, too, are saved along with the rest of the creation, for it is through the water that we share in His life. "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." In baptism, we receive the garment of light that Adam and Eve lost when they distorted themselves and the entire creation with sin and death. The incarnate Son of God sanctified our flesh and blood at His birth, and at His baptism He sanctifies the water through which our calling as those created in the divine image and likeness is fulfilled.

When we bless water at the conclusion of liturgy today, we will participate in our Lord's healing of all reality, for holy water is a sign that every dimension of creation is to be sanctified, to become holy by the fulfilment of God's original purposes for it. Even though we pollute it and it is sometimes our enemy in storms and floods in the world as we know it, God created water to sustain us and to bring life to the world. Christ has restored water to its intended purpose by making it holy through His baptism, which is a sign of His intention for every dimension of the universe that He spoke into existence.

When you have your Epiphany house blessing this year, holy water will be sprinkled in every room of your house, which is a sign of God's blessing upon even the small details of our daily lives. It is also a calling to sanctify every aspect of our life and to recognize that every dimension of who we are as human beings is to be baptized into Christ, dying to sin and rising with Him in holiness. True Christianity is not escape from the world or simply a matter of emotion or morality. No, we are called to become like God, to participate in His infinite holiness to the depths of our souls in every thought, word, and deed.

So this Theophany, we should become like the water that we will bless later in the service. That means responding to Jesus Christ's great blessing of the world such that we share in His life and become more fully who He created us to be in the first place in the image and likeness of God. No, none of this is magic. If we do not cooperate with our Lord's mercy by repentance and growth in holiness, holy water will do us no good. But if in humility and faith we thirst for the fulfilment of our daily lives in Christ, then drinking and being sprinkled with holy water will nourish us spiritually just like water revives a shrivelled plant on a hot, dry day.

Theophany makes it possible for us to quench our thirst for holiness, for the divine life for which we were made. This is the joyful, blessed life of the Holy Trinity that Jesus Christ has brought to the world. This Epiphany, let us all stop dying of thirst for God and instead be filled to overflowing by the mercy, presence, and power of the Lord. And then, like well watered and nourished plants, we will flourish and bear good fruit for the Kingdom of God.

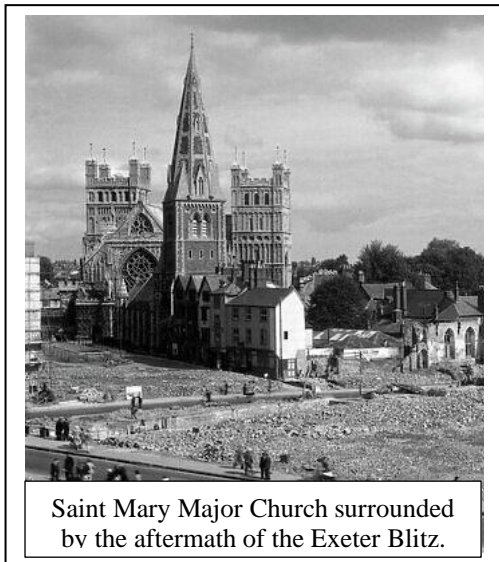
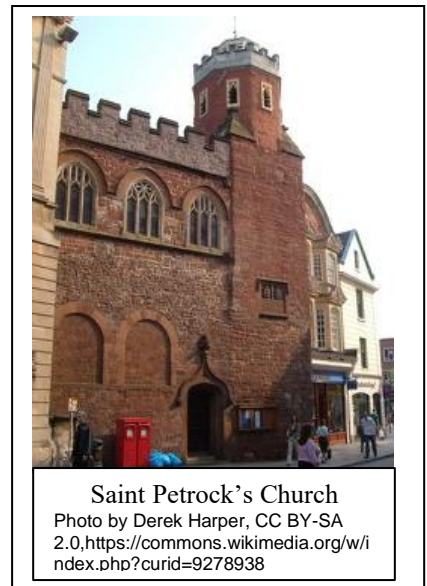
An Exeter Pilgrimage: Part 1

by Hugh Allen

The chief difference between the centre of Exeter today and in the Middle Ages is that then people actually lived there, huddled in narrow streets and courts where now we have offices, shops, more shops, expensive eateries, open spaces to hang about in and places to park cars. The walled city (together with such extra-mural settlements as St Sidwell's beyond the East Gate and the area between the West Gate and the river) was divided into parishes, some consisting of little more than three or four streets, and in every parish was its church. This pattern was discernible until well into the last century, but has been largely destroyed by a combination of so-called slum clearance, wartime bombing and subsequent retail development. (The greatest agent of destruction has been the motor car, with its need for wider roads and car parks.)

Most of these ancient parishes were founded before the Great Schism, and the saints to whom they were/are dedicated are in our Orthodox calendar, so our walks around the city can become a pilgrimage in their honour. Typically the Exeter churches were or are quite small, fitting in between neighbouring properties and if rebuilt (as many of them have been, sometimes twice or more) retaining their original scale – unlike say Norwich, where in the prosperous late middle ages humble street-corner churches were rebuilt on a grand scale and now pose something of a problem for those in charge of them.

We might start just east of the central crossroads, with possibly the earliest – **St Petroc(k)'s** in the High Street, later extended with multiple additions on its south side. Because it ended up wider than it's long the Victorians rearranged it with a new chancel beyond the outer south aisle and pews for the congregation facing it at right-angles to the normal east-west axis. In recent years it has been used as a centre for the homeless; in the latest rearrangement the homeless centre has been confined to the southern extensions (approached from Cathedral Yard) and the original rather narrow nave and chancel restored to use as a church (but most recently apparently without an altar). St Petroc (6th century) is celebrated as one of the great missionary saints of Devon and Cornwall, as testified by the number of local churches dedicated to him, so it's appropriate that we should make this our first port of call, praying for the reconversion of our western counties to Christ and His Church as well as for the staff and beneficiaries of the homeless centre.



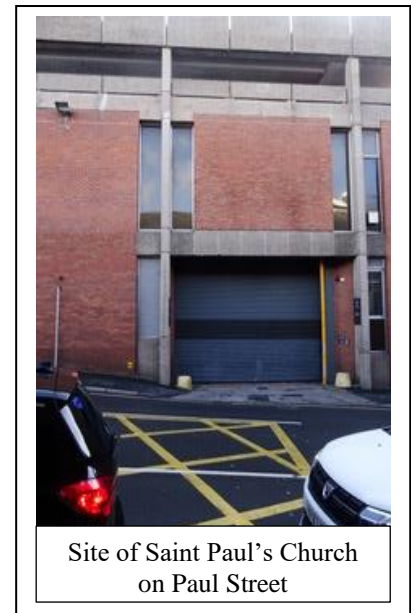
The greatest saint of all is of course Mary the Mother of God, and among the several churches in the city named for her the most important was (as its name suggests) that of **St Mary Major**. This stood across the narrow part of the Cathedral green from St Petroc's, in line with "Little Style", the three gabled houses dating from the 17th century near the exit to South Street. The site of its altar is marked by an iron cross which once graced the top of its spire, and here we should stop and pray to her who is "more honourable than the Cherubim, more glorious than the Seraphim".

The original St Mary Major (rebuilt several times, most recently in the 1860s but demolished just over a century later) was quite likely in place before the building of the **Cathedral**, or the 7th century **monastery of St Peter**, which occupied its site before the Bishop's *cathedra* (throne) was moved here from Crediton in 1050, and in those early days was rather more important. If

the Cathedral is on our itinerary (***NB free entry until 31 January***) our prayer there should be for the reunion between the churches of East and West, and we could continue this theme by making a small detour down the hill into South Street to visit the Roman Catholic church of the **Sacred Heart**.

Returning to High Street and crossing into the Guildhall shopping centre we find the ancient church of **St Pancras**, the Roman boy martyr. This sits slightly uneasily in its present setting, but the contrast between the kingdoms of God and of Mammon provides ample food for our prayer: “Thy kingdom come”, even here. The walkway back into High Street (past the rear entrance to Marks and Spencer’s) is all that’s left of Goldsmith(s’) Street. Appropriately there are two jewellers’ shops here: F. Hinds with a rather splendid old fireplace, and Ernest Jones at the High Street end. Until the early 20th century the street here narrowed to little more than a footpath, much of its width being occupied by the church of **All Hallows** (All Saints) *in Aurifabria* – may they pray for us, and for the bridal couples who come here to buy their rings. (Look out for the commemorative plaque.)

Before this area was redeveloped in the 1970s Goldsmith Street continued past the rear portico of the “New Market” into Paul Street, which takes its name from another of Exeter’s ancient but now non-existent churches. The dedicatee may not have been Paul the Apostle but Paul or Pol, 6th century bishop of Léon in Brittany (if you take the ferry to Roscoff the neighbouring town is Saint-Pol-de-Léon), believed by some to have been the brother of St Sidwell. **St Paul’s** (demolished 1936, along with neighbouring 14th century houses) stood on the corner of Goldsmith Street and Paul Street, somewhere near the upper of the two delivery entrances to the Guildhall Centre shops, whose unprepossessing backside runs its entire length. Not a place to linger since its progressive dehumanisation by the local council, but here (or when you’re up above, queuing in W.H. Smith’s) you might care to send up a prayer for the revival of the faith in once famously pious Brittany, and especially for its half-dozen or so Orthodox parishes and the community of Romanian nuns settled since 2017 in a disused Catholic monastery near Brest.



In a similar position to that of St Paul or Pol is the site of the former church of **St Kerrian**, more or less where the sloping walkway leads up from North Street to the back entrances of Primark and the local branch of Sainsbury’s. Older Exonians may remember a tiny fenced off space at this point with a signboard marking the site of the church, but there’s nothing now to show where it stood. St Kerrian is said to have been the patron saint of Cornish tin-miners (as was St Piran – were they one and the same?), so we might pray here for the safe deliverance of those in dangerous occupations.

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This is the first in a series of three itineraries; it is hoped that the second and third will appear in the next two issues. In preparing them I have referred to Beatrix Cresswell’s *Exeter Churches* (James G. Commin 1908) and the Devon volume of the *Buildings of England* series by Cherry & Pevsner (Penguin Books 1989), as well as two local websites: <http://demolition-exeter.blogspot.com> and <http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/index.php>, both of which are strongly recommended to those interested in exploring the history of our city. I’m extremely grateful to Dr Richard William Parker, whose local knowledge is unrivalled, for kindly reading through the text and making some suggestions.

Saint Gregory’s Foundation Update

Many thanks to those who have supported St Gregory’s Foundation by once again buying their Christmas cards. Their latest newsletter (received 5 December) carries news of the various projects serving vulnerable children and families in the countries of the former USSR, which your generosity helps to fund.

In spite of the difficult political situation the work continues, even though for much of last year in Russia staff couldn’t be paid because money couldn’t be transferred there – happily this problem has now been resolved. There is also the continuing difficulty that organisations such as SGF are regarded as “foreign agents”, and are consequently under suspicion.

A copy of the newsletter is available in St Anne’s, or it can be accessed online at <https://stgregorysfoundation.org.uk/test/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SGF-winter-newsletter-2022-final-1.pdf>.

Please continue to support the Foundation, and keep its work in your prayers.

H.A.

This Month We Celebrate

On Sunday January 1st: **THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST**

Saint Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (379)

We wish **Vassilis D** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Monday 2nd: **Saint Sylvester** of Rome (335)

Saint Seraphim Wonderworker of Sarov (1833)

We wish **Seraphim A H** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Tuesday 3rd: **Saint Genevieve** of Paris (5th C)

On Wednesday 4th: **Saint Nikiphoros** the Leper Chios, Greece (1964)

On Friday 6th: THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

On Saturday 7th: Synaxis of the **Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John**

We wish **John P** and **John T** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Monday 9th: **Hieromartyr Philip**, Metropolitan of Moscow, challenger of Ivan the Terrible (1569)

On Tuesday January 10th :

Saint Gregory of Nyssa (395) and his wife **Saint Theosevia the Deaconess** (385)

Saint Theophan the Recluse (1894)

On Wednesday 11th: **Saint Theodosios the Great** (529)

On Thursday 12th: **Saint Tatiana of Rome** (c230)

On Friday 13th: **Saint Hilary of Poitiers**, opponent of Arianism (367)

Saint Just of Cornwall (6thC)

Saint Kentigern (Mungo), first bishop of Glasgow and Strathclyde (c612)

We wish **Father John** and all in the Parish of Saint Bega, Saint Mungo and Saint Herbert in Keswick a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Saturday 14th: **Saint Nina**, Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of Georgia (c339)

Hieromartyr Platon of Tallinn (1919) and all the **New Martyrs of Estonia**

On Sunday 15th: **Saint Ita** of Killeedy, Ireland (c570)

We wish **Ita G** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Monday 16th: **Veneration of the Precious Chains of the Holy Apostle Peter**

Saint Fursey of Burgh Castle, Enlightener of East Anglia (650)

On Tuesday 17th: **Saint Anthony the Great** (356)

We wish **Eddie B**, **Tony R** and **Christa Antonina** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Wednesday 18th: **Saint Athanasios the Great** (373) and **Saint Cyril** (444) Archbishops of Alexandria

On Thursday 19th: **Saint Makarios the Great** of Egypt (391)

Saint Mark of Ephesus – ‘The Pillar of Orthodoxy’ (1444)

Saint Breward (Branwalader) of Cornwall and the Channel Islands (6thC)

On Saturday 21st: **Saint Maximos the Confessor** (662)

Virgin Martyr Agnes of Rome (c304)

We wish **Agnes O** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Tuesday 24th: **Saint Ksenia of St Petersburg** (1803)

We wish **Shusha S** and **Xenia C** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Wednesday 25th: **Saint Gregory the Theologian**, Archbishop of Constantinople (438)

On Friday 27th: Translation of the Relics of **Saint John Chrysostom** (389)

On Saturday 28th: **Saint Ephraim the Syrian** (373)

Saint Isaac the Syrian (7th C)

We wish **Isaac O** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Sunday 29th: **SUNDAY OF ZACCHAEUS** Beginning of the pre-Lenten cycle

Saint Gildas the Wise (Llanilltud, Wales c570) Historian: Author of *On the Ruin of Britain*

On Monday 30th: Synaxis of the Ecumenical Teachers and Great Hierarchs **Basil the Great**,

Gregory the Theologian and **John Chrysostom**

On Tuesday 31st: Wonderworkers and Unmercenary Healers **Cyrus** and **John** (311)

Noticeboard

Services:

Sunday January 1st: Typika Saint Anne's 10.30am
Orthros and Divine Liturgy, Vasilopitta Plymouth 10.30am

Thursday 5th: Vespers for the Feast of Theophany

Friday 6th: Feast of Theophany

Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth - time tbc Torquay 9.30am*

Great Blessing of the Waters Plymouth – time tbc Torquay 11.45am*

Blessing of the Sea Torquay Lily 12.00 at the church, then to the sea.

Sunday 8th: Typika - Celebration of the Feast of Theophany Saint Anne's 10.30am

Saturday 14th: Divine Liturgy Saint Anne's 10.30am

Sunday 15th: *Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 9.30am Torquay 9.30am*

Saturday 21st Vespers Saint Anne's 6pm

Sunday 22nd: Typika Saint Anne's 10.30am

Saturday 28th: Divine Liturgy Saint Anne's 10.30am

Bring and Share lunch at Belmont Park Hut after the Liturgy.

Sunday 29th: SUNDAY OF ZACCHAEUS *Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 9.30am Torquay 9.30am*

**To confirm service times at Plymouth, go to <https://plymchurch.com>*

Reader's Corner - *The Siege* by Ismail Kadare

The fictional siege in question is that by an Ottoman army of a Christian city in Albania in 1542. The narrative tells of the exhilaration and despair of the battlefield, of the constantly shifting strategies of war, and of those whose lives are held in balance, from the Pasha himself to the technicians, artillerymen, astrologer, blind poet and harem of women that accompany him. As insightful as it is compelling, *The Siege* is an unforgettable account of the clash of two great civilisations, a clash which we become aware will reach its crisis the following year with the siege of Constantinople. But this is not only a gripping historical novel – it is also an exploration of the ultimate failure of war as a human interaction, and the fact that even if we accept that it is a sometimes inevitable consequence of our fallen nature, there can ultimately be no winners. I was particularly struck by this reflection by the Ottoman General, which, if we simply substitute 'Ukrainians' for 'Albanians', takes on a disturbing relevance for today:

"If we don't overcome them on this first campaign, then we'll need twice as many men to win at the second attempt, and three times as many at the third attempt, and so on. If they escape from this hell, then it will be very hard to annihilate them later on. They'll become accustomed to sieges, to hunger and thirst, to massacres and alerts. Meanwhile their first-born will be the children of war. And the worst of it is that they will become familiar with death. They will get used to it the way an animal that has been tamed no longer causes fear. So even if we do conquer them in battle, we will never overcome them. In attacking them, in striking at them without mercy, in throwing our boundless army at them without succeeding in laying them low, we are unwittingly doing the Albanians a great service.... We thought we were putting them to death. But in fact, we are making them immortal."

Martin Olsson

Ismail Kadare: *The Siege* Canongate Books 2008 (First published in Albanian *Keshjtjella* 1970)

What is a Merciful Heart?

What is a merciful heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, the birds, the animals, the demons, and for all that exists.

By the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful person pour forth tears in abundance. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a person's heart, and by such great compassion, the heart is humbled and one cannot bear to hear or see any injury or slight sorrow in any of creation.

For this reason, such a person offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy; all this because of the great compassion that burns without measure in a heart that is in the likeness of God.

St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 81

Prayers for Blessing on Our Houses

Once again, it is sadly the case that there is very little likelihood of a priest being available in the foreseeable future to come and bless our houses. In such circumstances, we need to take responsibility for this important ceremony ourselves. All we need is a bowl of blessed water (from last year if that is all we have – it doesn't have a 'best before' date), and something to sprinkle it with. When we process around the house, we can use a candle and some incense if we have them. We begin the ceremony at our icon corner, and that is where we return for the closing Troparion. Father Patrick has suggested this outline:

To begin:

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

O Heavenly King....

Holy God.... x3 Glory....Both now....

O all holy Trinity....

Lord have mercy x3 Glory....Both now....

Our Father....

Then sing or read the Troparion of the Feast:

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest, for the voice of Father bore witness unto Thee calling Thee the beloved Son, and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed His word as sure and steadfast. O Christ, our God who hast appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee.

Then the prayer:

O God our Saviour, the True Light, Who wast baptized in the Jordan by John to renew all men by the waters of regeneration, and Who didst condescend to enter under the roof of Zacchaeus, bringing salvation to him and to all his house: As the same Lord, also keep safe from harm those who dwell here; grant us Thy blessing, purification and health of body and soul; grant all our petitions that are for our salvation and eternal life; for Thou art blessed, together with Thine eternal Father, and Thy Most-holy, Good and Life-creating Spirit, now and for ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Then sprinkle holy water all round the house, singing (if possible) 'When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized...' or just say it as a conclusion.

At the end: 'Through the prayers of our holy fathers...' as we began.

Ed.

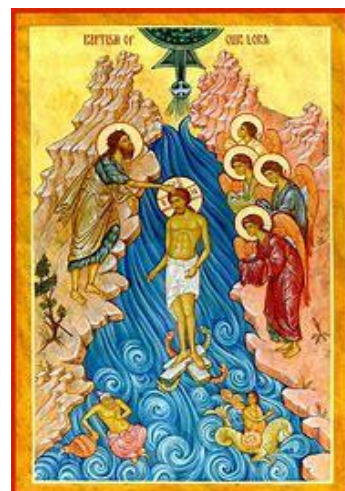
Orthodox Pebbles – Exploring the Feast of Theophany with Children

As with the other great feasts, the Orthodox Pebbles website has lots of ideas for activities to help young children learn about Theophany. Here is part of the explanation of the icon of the Feast:

'The icon of Theophany is one of the very few Orthodox icons showing all three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The Father is depicted as a segment of a circle on the top of the icon, symbolizing the opening heavens – sometimes a blessing hand is also added. The Son is Jesus Christ, being baptized in the water. Rays of light are shed upon our Lord, and the Holy Spirit is descending on Him in the form of a dove.

'In many versions of the icon, we also see two small figures swimming in the water of Jordan at the bottom of the icon, together with the fish. The male figure is an allegory of the river Jordan, and the female one is an allegory of the sea; they both represent Old Testament texts prophesying the Baptism.'

Go to: [Holy Theophany and the Blessing of the Waters – Orthodox Pebbles](#)



Contributions for the February issue should reach the Editors at

martinolsson827@btinternet.com or by post at Little Linhay, Bondleigh, EX20 2AJ by Monday 23rd January, please.

Any opinions expressed in this newsletter are entirely those of the named authors or identified sources and should not